

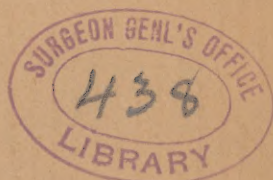
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Opiates in the Pelvic
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THE INDISCRIMINATE USE OF OPIATES IN THE PELVIC DISEASES OF WOMEN.

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NOTHING in the diseases peculiar to women has impressed me with deeper horror than the indiscriminate use of opiates for the relief of their sufferings. In an experience of forty years, so universal has been the use of this drug, or some of its preparations, by those not special students of the uterus and its surroundings, when a suffering woman comes under their care, that I have frequently been brought to doubt whether opium and its preparations have not done much more harm in the world than good. Few, if any, women come to me with pelvic troubles of years' or months' standing, who are not more or less addicted to the habitual use of anodynes. And of all habits, none is so demoralizing to the morals, none so destructive to the intellect, none so paralyzing to the physical man, as the habitual use of the preparations of opium. Drunkenness from alcohol does not compare with it in its injurious effects. The moral and intellectual faculties of the alcoholic drunkard may be relied on in the intervals of soberness. The moral and intellectual faculties of the opium drunkard can never be trusted. Its victims will lie and steal, their intellects are feeble and puerile, and their bodies are helpless for any physical effort.

It is with pain I say, that nearly all, if not every one who has come to me with the opium habit, have been led into it by their attending physician. How many such patients have been under my care I cannot now say with certainty,

but certainly thousands ; and I cannot now remember a single one who has not been taught its effects and its mode of administration by the attending physician. At this writing I have four such cases under my care, one of whom, a pretty married woman of twenty-four years of age, is a perfect sot from the use of opium. For three years her physicians, who have been many, have given her two hypodermics of morphia daily—until she was taking six or seven grains of morphia a day—and not one had the courage to stop it. It was commenced by the physician and continued by the physician.

I found her with a bad bilateral lacerated cervix uteri, a subinvoluted uterus, and pelvic cellulitis. Nothing was done to cure the disease, everything done to relieve the symptoms ; with but one remedy, morphia subcutaneously, its most injurious form of administration.

I cannot be too strong in my condemnation of the use of the preparations of opium for the pelvic diseases of women. None are ever benefited by it, all are made worse by it, pain is increased by it, unless the patient is brought to absolute stupefaction, and the recuperative powers of the diseased parts are destroyed by the paralyzing effects of the opiate on the nerves of the parts.

It is of no use to attempt to cure the physical disease in such a case till we have cured the opium habit, and it is generally much more difficult to cure the latter than the former.

I never give a hypodermic for the relief of pain in the diseases of women, and I very rarely give any opiate by the mouth in such cases ; and, if so, it is always combined with other things to disguise it, and the character of the prescription is kept from the knowledge of the patient and her friends, and she is never allowed to take more than one or two such doses when in great pain, and never allowed to renew or repeat the remedy. Nothing grows on a person so rapidly or so fixedly. Other means may be used to mollify the pains, though not so certainly or promptly ; but it is much better to worry with the patient and her friends, than to resort to the prompt and certain hypodermic, which is sure to be demanded

again, and which is sure to bring reproach and condemnation on the physician who first and secondly gave it.

I have never heard more violent condemnations heaped on any physicians than on those who first gave the opiate to those who have acquired the opium habit. The patient, the friends, the acquaintances, one and all, abuse him for everything that is abominable. Never give a hypodermic in such cases. Use all other means at your command, and, if necessary, give the patient into other hands rather than resort to this demoralizing syringe. You will be forgiven; the man that uses it will not fare as well.

The uterus and its appendages are the centre of sympathies in a woman. Nowhere in the body is the sympathetic nervous system more prolific in the distribution of its ramifications. Disease in any one or all of these organs may have its symptoms reflected to any part of the body, and we often find all the symptoms of uterine disease manifested in distant organs without any local manifestations; and it is only after an accurate examination of the vagina, clitoris, uterus, tubes, and ovaries (at first wholly unsuspected) that we find the seat of the disease manifested by extraneous symptoms. Nausea and all sorts of dyspeptic symptoms frequently have their origin in the uterus and its appendages, not suspected before the local examination. Head, heart, throat, lungs, liver, kidney symptoms are frequently due to disease of the pelvic organs; nervous affections and neuralgias everywhere are more or less universal in organic disease of the uterus and its appendages. The skilled gynecologist will recognize in the above symptoms the presence of diseased pelvic organs, although all local symptoms may be absent; and he will look for their relief in the cure of those organs which are the exciting cause, and not in the organ which is sympathetically effected.

In the nausea of pregnancy it is of no use to look to the stomach as the seat of the disease and as the organ to be treated. The trouble is in the uterus, and if we would cure the former we must direct our remedies to the latter. The

nausea which so commonly accompanies uterine disease will never be cured by remedies directed to the stomach. Cure the uterus and the stomach will be well.

So the universal neuralgic pains which accompany uterine disease will never be cured by the resort to opium and its preparations and its varieties of administration; but will be made worse and worse, the longer these remedies are continued. Pain is always a symptom depending on some pre-existing organic cause, and if we are content to treat the symptom and not go to the root from which it springs, we may, with great damage to the nervous system, obtund the painful symptoms, but the organic cause remaining will soon reproduce the same.

Nothing has given me so much trouble in the practice of gynecology as to get rid of the evil effects of anodynes given for the relief of pain in the diseases of women. Upon no class of patients do these remedies take so strong a hold as on women, and it is sometimes impossible to cure them of their evil effects. They become opium sots for life. Drag out a miserable existence, a curse to all with whom they are connected.

I do not hesitate to say that there cannot be any diseased condition, except advanced cancer, which justifies the habitual administration of opium for the relief of pain; and I would not make this an exception, except that in spite of all therapeutical agents the disease so rapidly kills the patient that there can be no objection to keeping her in a semi-soporific state to the comfortable ending of her days. In the early stage of the case, while there is yet hope for relieving or curing the disease by surgical interference, opium should be studiously withheld, as even with recovery and the acquired opium habit, the last state of that woman would be worse than the first.

Very few who are not constantly and analytically investigating the diseases peculiar to woman, and who are not critically dissecting the reflected nervous symptoms of which they are the cause, have any idea of the great number or

women who are addicted to the use of the opium preparations, and I cannot remember a single case in which the victim was not taught its effects and the modes of administration.

As a rule, women take opiates and men alcohol, both seeking the same pleasurable results. A woman is very degraded before she will consent to display drunkenness to mankind; whereas she can obtain equally, if not more, pleasurable feelings with opiates and not disgrace herself before the world.

It behooves us, then, to think once, twice, three times, before we give a woman complaining of pain an opiate; and if we do, she should never know what we are giving, what is the dose, and what we expect to be the results. A second or third dose should never be given under like circumstances. If we do, we are almost sure to be the cause of her degradation and ruin. Let me say here, that it is rarely, if ever, necessary to resort to opium for the relief of pain. There are many other remedies which may be used as substitutes. Not with the same promptness to the physician or satisfaction to her friends, but still one, or a number of such remedies will accomplish the end, and save the patient from the risk of the opium habit.

When called to a nervous woman at night, apparently writhing in pain, it is so easy to give a hypodermic injection, have her quiet in five minutes, and return to one's bed for a good night's sleep, that the temptation is very strong to do so. This has to be repeated once or twice in a longer or shorter space of time. In the meanwhile the organic trouble, which is the cause of her nervous sufferings, is obscured from observation, the patient grows steadily worse, the opium habit is acquired, the friends become dissatisfied with her medical attendant, take her off to a man familiar with diseases peculiar to women, to learn that she has either a retroflexed uterus, prolapsed ovary, chronic pelvic cellulitis, or peritonitis, pyosalpinx, or pelvic abscess, etc.

How much better for the patient, as well as for the attend-

ing physician, had she been sent to the specialist in the beginning.

Occasionally we find the opium habit in the male, but many times more frequently do we find it confirmed in the female. Men will use alcohol for its stimulating and narcotic effects. Under similar circumstances women will use opium, or its preparations, for the same effects.

As a rule, never give women opiates to relieve pain when due to the reproductive organs. Other means can be found for this emergency; while the whole attention should be directed to curing the organic diseases of which the pain is merely a symptom. The anodyne simply relieves pain for the time being. It has no curative effect, but retards the restoration to health, and its victim runs the risk of becoming an opium inebriate.

